



TOWN OF WESTFORD  
BOARD OF HEALTH  
TOWN HALL  
WESTFORD, MASSACHUSETTS 01886  
(978) 692-5509

October 12, 2005

Dear Parents,

The Westford Board of Health is tracking two potential health concerns. Please carefully review the following information that suggests ways to protect yourself and your family.

1. Late last week the Massachusetts Department of Public Health informed the Board of Health that a dead bird, received from Westford, tested positive for **West Nile Virus (WNV)**. Although this does not mean we have any human cases in our community, a positive bird or mosquito is an indicator that the virus is present in the bird/mosquito population in our area. As a result added measures to protect yourself and your family should be implemented. The risk of West Nile can be decreased by reducing an individual's exposure to mosquitoes and taking special precautions during periods of higher risk of infection.

WNV is a virus transmitted through mosquitoes. The virus grows in birds and is spread from bird to bird by infected mosquitoes. If mosquitoes infected with the virus bite horses or humans, the animal or person can become sick.

WNV causes illness that varies from a mild fever to more serious disease like encephalitis or meningitis. Persons older than 50 years of age have a higher risk of developing severe illness. In a small percentage of people infected by the virus, the disease can be serious or fatal.

The fall season is filled with back-to school activities and an increase in outdoor school and recreational sports. The peak time for transmission of both WNV and **Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE)**, (another mosquito-borne virus), extends through the fall. We recommend that all parents follow these simple measures to reduce the chance of being infected:

**Avoid Outdoor Activity During Peak Mosquito Hours.**

The hours from dusk to dawn are peak mosquito biting times for many mosquitoes. Take extra care to use repellent and protective clothing during evening and early morning -- or consider avoiding outdoor activities during these times.

**Clothing Can Help Reduce Mosquito Bites.**

When possible, wear long-sleeves, long pants and socks when outdoors during peak mosquito activity time.

**Apply Mosquito Repellent when you go outdoors.**

A wide variety of mosquito repellent products are available. The most effective repellents contain DEET (N, N-diethyl-m-toluamide), Picaridin (KBR 3023) or Permethrin. Always follow the instructions on the product label. DEET and Picaridin products can be used directly on skin and on clothing. Permethrin products can be used on clothing but not directly on skin. Oil of lemon eucalyptus has also demonstrated efficacy against mosquito bites, with protection similar to repellents with low concentrations of DEET.

Products containing DEET should not be used on children less than 2 months of age and should be used in concentrations of 30% or lower for older children and adults.

Apply only as much repellent as needed. Choose a product that will provide sufficient protection for the amount of time that you will be spending outdoors. Saturation does not increase repellent efficacy. Product labels often indicate the length of time that you can expect protection from a product. Keep repellents away from eyes, nostrils and lips: do not inhale or ingest repellents or get them into the eyes. Avoid applying repellents to portions of children's hands that are likely to have contact with eyes or mouth. Never use repellents on wounds or irritated skin. Wash repellent-treated skin after coming indoors.

More information on mosquito-borne diseases, on protecting yourself from bites by mosquitoes and on safe application of mosquito repellents can also be obtained by visiting the MDPH web site on arboviral (mosquito-transmitted) diseases <http://www.mass.gov/dph/wnv/wnv1.htm>.

**2.** We are seeing an alarming increase in the number of reported cases of **Lyme** disease in Westford. Over 20 cases were received in a three week period. In all of 2004 we received only 10 reported cases. Lyme disease is caused by bacteria. Initial symptoms usually begin 3 to 30 days after a person is bitten by an infected deer tick and may include an expanding rash at the site of the bite and/or flu-like symptoms. If left untreated, the bacteria can spread to almost any site in the body and can cause arthritis, neurologic difficulties, and/or heart problems. Cases of Lyme disease occur throughout Massachusetts.

Ticks are found throughout Massachusetts and go through a multiple-stage life cycle that includes larval, nymphal, and adult stages. Ticks are most active during warm weather months (May-June for nymphs and October-May for adult ticks), but can be active year-round when temperatures are above freezing. Ticks are generally found in grassy, brushy, or wooded areas. Ticks do not fly or jump. They attach to animals or people that come into direct contact with them. Deer tick nymphs are the size of a poppy seed and deer tick adults are the size of a sesame seed.

### **Protect your family and pets from tick bites.**

Prevention begins with you! Follow these tips if you live, work, or spend leisure time in an area likely to have ticks:

- The single most important thing you can do is check yourself for ticks once a day. Favorite places ticks like to go on your body include areas between the toes, back of the knees, groin, armpits, and neck, along the hairline, and behind the ears. Remember to check your children and pets, too. Remove any attached tick as soon as possible.
- Stick to main pathways and the center of trails when hiking.
- Wear long-sleeved, light colored shirts and long pants tucked into your socks.
- Use repellents that contain DEET on your clothes or exposed skin, or those that contain permethrin on your clothes.
- Talk to your veterinarian about the best ways to protect your pets and livestock from ticks.

There is currently no human vaccine available to protect against Lyme disease or any other tick-borne disease.

### **Reduce the number of ticks around your home.**

You don't have to be walking in the woods to be bitten by a tick. You can be in your own backyard! You can reduce the number of ticks around your home by following these tips:

- Keep grass cut short.

- Remove leaf litter and brush from around your home.
- Prune low lying bushes to let in more sunlight.
- Keep woodpiles and birdfeeders off the ground and away from your home.
- Keep the plants around stone walls cut short.
- Use a three-foot wide woodchip, mulch or gravel barrier where your lawn meets the woods. Ticks are less likely to cross the barrier into the lawn because they are prone to drying out. It also serves as a reminder that people who cross the barrier into the wooded area may be at higher risk of getting ticks.
- Ask your local nursery about plants to use in your yard that do not attract deer.
- Use deer fencing (for yards 15 acres or more).

If you choose to use a pesticide to reduce the number of ticks on your property, hire a licensed applicator experienced with tick control. Your local landscaper or arborist may be a licensed applicator. In general, good tick control can be achieved with no more than two pesticide applications in any year. When selecting an applicator, ask if they will provide:

- A written pest control plan that includes information on the pesticide to be used.
- Information about non-chemical pest control alternatives.
- Signs to be posted around the property after the application.

**If you find a tick on yourself or a family member or pet, the tick should be carefully removed as soon as possible.** The longer an infected tick remains attached to a person or animal, the higher the likelihood of disease transmission. Use fine point tweezers to grip the mouthparts of the tick as close to the skin as possible. The tick should not be squeezed or twisted, but pulled straight outward with steady, gentle pressure. You should not apply kerosene, petroleum jelly, nail polish, or a hot match tip to remove the tick. These measures are not effective and may result in injury. Circle the calendar date and note where on the body the tick was removed. You may want to save the tick for identification. Your physician may choose to treat you following a deer tick bite. Notify your health care provider if you have been bitten by a deer tick or if you develop any unusual illness following a tick bite.

**For more information on diseases spread by ticks contact the** Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Division of Epidemiology and Immunization, (617) 983-6800 or [www.mass.gov/dph](http://www.mass.gov/dph)

### **Become informed!**

The Westford Board of Health has scheduled an educational session entitled **“Protect Your Family against Mosquito and Tick- Borne Diseases”** on October 26<sup>th</sup> from 7-9 pm at the Millennium School. Dr. David Sidebottom, an infectious disease specialist from Saints Memorial Medical Center, will present the program and provide an opportunity for questions and answers. All members of the community are invited to attend. Reservations are requested by calling 978 692-5509, so we can adequately prepare for materials and space.

Feel free to call if you have any questions.

***Sandy Collins, RN***

Sandy Collins, RN

Director of Health Care Services